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TAGS: EAID KDEM PGOV SOCI PREL UNMIK YI PHUM

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM DELIVERS STRONG MESSAGE TO KOSOVO SERBS AT SCHOOL INAUGURATION IN NORTH MITROVICA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: COM used the inauguration of a USAID-funded school renovation project in Serb-majority north Mitrovica to underscore the U.S. commitment to the continued presence of a vibrant Serb community in Kosovo, with full legal rights and special protections for its cultural and religious sites. She also used an attendant media opportunity with Serbian RTS-affiliated Radio Kontakt Plus in north Mitrovica to spread a determined message on holding Kosovar Albanian perpetrators of crimes against Serbs accountable for their actions, specifically condemning the previous week's bomb attack on a train line used by Serbs and calling on Albanian political leaders to be equally resolute in their condemnations. End summary

School Renovation Spreads Message of U.S. Engagement

¶2. (SBU) On December 12, COM traveled to north Mitrovica to preside over a ceremony marking the completion of a USAID-funded major renovation project at the Sveti Sava elementary school, serving an exclusively Serb population. The \$100,000 project, implemented through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and carried out by a Kosovo Serb construction firm from Gracanica, included extensive repairs to a leaking roof and damaged walls and installation of new thermopane windows, as well as brand new flooring, bathroom facilities and a playground for the children.

¶3. (SBU) The event was covered extensively by local Serb and Albanian media. In his remarks at a special school assembly convened for the inauguration, the school principal praised the U.S. for its support of the project, citing the quality of the work and the speed with which it was carried out (the renovation was completed within one month of the contract being finalized). COM thanked him, assuring those watching that "the U.S. Government believes that there must always be a strong and vibrant Serb community in Kosovo with full legal rights and with special protection for their cultural and religious sites."

COM Condemns Violence Against Serbs on RTS-Affiliated Station

¶ 14. (SBU) COM reiterated these points in an interview the same day with Serbian RTS (Radio Television Serbia)-affiliated Radio Kontakt Plus in north Mitrovica. (Note: RTS radio and television is the primary venue through which Serbs in Kosovo receive their information.) She strongly condemned acts of violence against the Serb population, and specifically called upon Kosovar Albanian political leaders to prevent such attacks in future. She pointed to the previous week's bomb attack on a train line serving Serbs in Kosovo as an example of particularly heinous behavior that could obstruct the process of making a final determination of Kosovo's status.

¶ 15. (SBU) As part of ongoing efforts to engage Kosovo's northern Serb communities, the USG has invested USD 1.4 million since August into quick-impact infrastructure projects in northern Kosovo. Projects in the three northern Serb-majority municipalities include water and sewage in Zvecan; refurbishment of the town hall in Zubin Potok; and road construction throughout the three northern municipalities. Other planned or ongoing projects in north Mitrovica include construction of an annex to the public library, refurbishment of a workshop in the technical school, and rehabilitation of the physiotherapy department in the health center, all of which will be completed in the next few months and will pose new opportunities for media engagement.

¶ 16. (SBU) Comment: We will continue to invest in Serb communities north and south of the Ibar, and we will continue to use these kinds of events to repeat our key messages. The onset of winter gives us a few months in which to plan new projects for the spring; in our FY 07 SEED request, we have

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proposed the creation of a new infrastructure fund that would allow us to expand our work in these critical fields.

¶ 17. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.

KAIDANOW